DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 425 419 CS 013 305

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TITLE The Interdependence of Reading, Writing and Spelling.
PUB DATE 1998-10-08
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Emergent Literacy; Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; *Reading Writing Relationship; *Spelling Instruction; Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; Writing Research

ABSTRACT

The more children read, the more they write and the better they spell. As the quality of a child's reading content rises, so does his or her writing. Emergent literacy research suggests that reading and writing occur simultaneously and encourage the growth of one another. Research has also concluded that writing frequently for authentic purposes cultivates a student's value of correct spelling. It is sound practice to address reading, writing, and spelling as a whole, a practice based in evidence that they are inextricably linked. Support and encouragement given to readers and writers improves their spelling, validating reading as an indispensable tool in learning to write and spell. Contains 9 references. (RS)

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ED 425 419

The Interdependence of Reading, Writing & Spelling

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October 8, 1998

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Introduction

From the perspective of traditional education, the teaching of reading has endured a varied approach. Whether taught the old fashioned way, through phonics or the whole language approach, the responsibility to become a better reader belongs as much to the child as it does to the educator. The encouragement for children to read has not gained the momentum needed in a society where the demands of literacy are immense. To instill the love of reading among children today has huge implications.

The authors of this paper assert that if the habit of reading is successfully instilled among children, children make remarkable discoveries. When children read with interest, their likelyhood in developing a writing aptitude is high. The cultivation of this newly found craft can have a significant effect upon their cognitive development. We believe the more children read, the more they write and the better they spell. And as the quality of a child's reading content rises, so does his or her writing.

Statement

It is the reciprocal nature of reading, writing and spelling that the authors of this study explore. Through documented research, educators notice that the more one reads, the better one writes and spells, and what a child reads has a direct influence upon the quality of writing. The information discussed in this review is crucial in understanding the ongoing challenges confronting educators when developing effective reading curricula along the road to literacy.

Research

Are reading, writing and spelling separate entities or do they have a connection? What comes first? Does a child learn to read first and then write and spell or do writing skills emerge initially? Emergent literacy research suggests reading and writing occur simultaneously and encourage the growth of one another (Gunning, 1986). As reading improves, writing becomes more refined. Thus, we recognize reading as the backbone and writing as the lifeblood (Scott, 1994) - a tangible assessment of a child's reading aptitude.

With this in mind, let us examine more specifically how reading affects writing. In a study by Stotsky (1983), students assigned reading improved as much or more in expository writing as those assigned grammar and writing assignments. Writing improved when active engagement occurred. Similarly, Mills (1974) and Eckhoff (1983) noted the quality of reading that children engage in has an impact upon the quality of their writing. For example, samples of writing from children that previously read simple basal stories tended to be simplified while samples from children exposed to more elaborate basals of children's literature reflected a more complex writing style. From these children, imitation emerged as a writing strategy and the style of the authors whose stories were read was mirrored in the writing samples. Further strengthening this particular assertion, Calkins (1986) discovered that by reading particular genres of writing, a familiarity of that form is developed which is then reflected in the students' writing. Calkins went on to say, students that read mystery stories developed a penchant for writing their own mysteries. Butler and Turbill (1984) noted that reading

can assist in the transition from dry narrative writing to lively expository writing. This occurred when the students they observed were given beginning science books to read regarding their subjects. This research makes it clear that exposure to the written word significantly affects the beginning writer in style, content and quality.

We have illustrated convincingly the positive effect reading has on writing and that a strong connection exists between the two. Considering these assertions, it now becomes appropriate to consider where spelling falls into the equation. What relationship does spelling share with its counterparts, reading and writing? Does spelling derive as beneficial an effect from reading as writing does? How do particular approaches to spelling affect writing? These are important questions to address as this most delicate relationship is further explored.

While it is clear that reading has a positive effect upon writing, let us examine how writing is influenced by different approaches in spelling. It seems reasonable to conclude that an overemphasis on spelling could affect writing in an adverse way. To support this conclusion, a compelling study by Bloodgood (1991), revealed that students under no pressure to spell correctly experienced an unimpeded, creative atmosphere in which they found the freedom to hone their writing skills. It is apparent that children feel safe in taking risks with their writing if allowed to spell with a trial and error approach. Permitting children to spell freely and to spell words the way they think they should be spelled is conducive to the discovery of a child's written voice. With practice, this voice becomes stronger and correct ways of spelling are discovered. But with a de-emphasis upon spelling, one may ponder the value beginning writers place

on spelling. Does risk taking promote poor spelling? Does it leave the impression upon children that spelling isn't important? These questions reveal the instances in which we may consider reading, writing and spelling as separate entities, in that refinement in particular areas may take place in stages. Research concludes that writing frequently for authentic purposes cultivates a student's value of correct spelling (Gentry, 1987). So we see, where students are taken seriously as writers, they consequently take their spelling more seriously.

With the research stated, we see a trend in addressing spelling last. This in no way understates the importance of spelling but merely reveals the appropriateness of tackling spelling once the writing process has been freely practiced. The teaching of spelling should revolve around the teaching of reading and writing, (Bean & Bouffler, 1987). Perhaps, best said, "spelling is the consequence of reading and writing, not the access to it."

It is the sound practice to address reading, writing and spelling as a whole, a practice based in evidence that they are inextricably linked.

Summary/Conclusions

Most would assume reading, writing and spelling are separate entities but upon closer inspection, a reciprocal interdependence is revealed. Throughout this paper, reading is stated first with writing and spelling following. While no one area should take precedence over another, it is appropriate that educators stress reading as the initial focus thus precipitating a natural evolution into writing and spelling. Administering reading curricula in a low pressure, interesting and stimulating way is

conducive to instilling within children a love of reading that naturally enhances their writing aptitude. Exposure to the written word, preferably age appropriate text of a lively, high quality nature provides a vocabulary of both style and content for the beginning writer. The more the beginning writer is exposed to print, his word recognition and comprehension skills increase. This provides the child an arsenal with which to attack writing with preparedness and understanding.

As a natural consequence, the printed word provides a strong visual image of correct spelling. Reading promotes writing. Writing with a de-emphasis upon spelling nourishes the process. Support and encouragement given to readers and writers improves their spelling, validating reading as an indispensable tool in learning to write and spell.

Implications

The implications of this research are broad. In this age of technological advancement, computer games and the like, reading as a hobby and passion among children of today is rare. This reality amplifies the responsibility educators must assume in imparting to children the far reaching benefits of reading. Educators are challenged to present reading curricula in an interesting and stimulating fashion. If this is achieved, the areas of writing and spelling, once treated separately can be naturally addressed in a logical, methodical way. That children enjoy what they read and naturally progress as writers and spellers should be the prevailing mantra. This approach will aid in the implementation of effective reading curricula as we climb the mountain towards literacy.

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